

His First Coup

Elk Morning Counts His First Coup Indian Education for All Language Arts Model Teaching Unit

Overview

Anchor Text

Elk Morning Counts His First Coup

Grade Level

First to Fourth Grade

Time Frame

Two - five days (30 – 40 minutes per day or as time permits for classroom schedule and student grade level)

Lesson Summary

Students will hear a story about an Apsáalooke (Crow) tradition of courage and honor. *Elk Morning Counts His First Coup* and supplementary materials could be taught over two-five days. The following lesson plans support the standards for ELA and Social Studies. Additionally, some of the supplemental activities are based around the area of Red Lodge (traditional territory of the Crow people) but could be adapted to any outdoor landscape in Montana.

Synopsis

Elk Morning, a young Crow man, must complete four courageous deeds (counting coup) to become a Crow warrior. The first and most important coup is to sneak into a rival's camp and capture a prized horse. The story is told from an authentic Crow perspective and is an accurate and historic portrait of the Crow culture and the tradition of counting coup. The book is beautifully illustrated by three Crow artists.

About the Authors

The book was written by local Montana authors, Sabrena Half, A.J. Otjen, and Bessie Stopsatprettyplaces. The authors have created a book company called [Bakaate](#), which means children in the Crow language. The works of local Crow artists fill the pages of the book, and those artists include Zachary Dean BirdFarway, Larry Big Lake and Salisha Old Bull.

The Crow Indian Reservation encompasses 2.2 million acres, mainly in Big Horn County, in south central Montana. The Crow tribe's name in their own language is "Apsáalooke," which means "children of the large-beaked bird." White men later misinterpreted the word as "crow." The



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Map of Tribal Territories in Montana shows the current reservation location and traditional territory of the Crow people.

Learning Objectives

While reading and discussing the aspects of the book, students will:

- ✓ work effectively and respectfully in a small group, listening to everyone's responses;
- ✓ understand and analyze literary elements such as character and plot;
- ✓ ask questions, check inferences, and summarize information from reading and viewing background sources related to Crow cultural traditions;
- ✓ create and share with classmates one's own responses to and understandings of the unique Crow cultural traditions encountered in this book;
- ✓ tell the meaning of the words: Crow, Apsáalooke, coup, Vision Quest, and rite of passage;
- ✓ determine mood and tone of artwork and juxtapose the story;
- ✓ compare and contrast two or more text-based vocabulary words;
- ✓ retell the important details of the story;
- ✓ connect the details of the story to the traditional land base of the Crow;
- ✓ participate in topic-specific discussion to dig deeper into theme, plot, conflict, and characters of the story;
- ✓ organize and write a letter to support learning topics and inquire further to connect to present day culture and traditions;
- ✓ identify examples of the animal-human relationship in Crow culture; and
- ✓ identify challenges of landscape as they relate to counting coup.

Materials Needed

- One copy of Elk Morning Counts His First Coup
- Student journals (a plain lined-paper notebook with student-labeled dates specific to each journal entry works well)
- Access to websites
- Paper, pens, pencils, crayons
- Map of Tribal Territories in Montana
- Computers and projector

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Instructional Plan

Day One: Introduction of the Lesson, Overview of Crow Tribe, and Art Literacy Activity

Review the [Tribal Territories of Montana](#) map which shows the traditional territories and locations of current reservations. Utilize this map to make students aware of the large traditional land base of the Crow Tribe. Ask students if they remember what the Crow tribe call themselves in their own language. Share some basic facts regarding the tribe. General background information regarding the Crow tribe can be found in the OPI resource [Montana Indians: Their History and Location](#) and more detailed information is located on the [Little Big Horn College Library website](#). Facilitate a class discussion about the Crow and tell students they will be reading a book that is about a Crow tribal tradition. Show the book to the class and introduce the art activity.

Introduction for Literacy Activity: Inform students they are going to look closely at details, lines, colors, scenes, mood, style, etc. of artwork in the story. Display/present one page for each artist from the story for a two-to-four-minute examination.

Prompt students to share what their findings are. Follow with the question “How does the artwork make you feel? Why?”

Ask students to predict the meaning or message the artists are trying to communicate by analyzing the artwork.

Live art: Assign students in groups and have them create an art project of their favorite art piece from the story. Allow ample time for students to create their artwork and provide guidance as needed; e.g., an individual, a horse, a tipi, mountains. Have them share their artwork with the class and display them in the classroom.

Research and Reflection: Ask students, in pairs, to research the artists, Zackery Dean BirdFaraway, Larry Big Lake, and Salisha Old Bull to find out information about them. This activity could be done via direct instruction or student lead.

- Three facts about the artist.
- Two other pieces of artwork and how they compare/contrast to artwork in this story. Are the styles the same? Different?
- If students have trouble locating artist information they could compare and contrast artwork from the book.

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Day Two: Art Compare/Contrast

Reflection Post it: What is one thing from the art literacy lesson from the previous day that was impactful or has stayed with you until today?

Explain to students they will continue that art interpretation skill today by looking at other artwork that focuses on the same topic of counting coup.

Define *coup* and tell students they are going to be learning about a famous Crow tribal member and his experiences of counting coup in World War II.

Ask students to create a T-Chart. Students should use the two columns to compare artwork from the *Elk Morning* story to artwork showing Joe Medicine Crow counting coup. The Smithsonian Magazine website features the article [Remembering Dr. Joe Medicine Crow](#), sharing his heroic deeds in World War II. It also includes ledger art created by Chester Medicine Crow depicting his actions.

Display the ledger art images and have students fill in their T-Charts comparing one of the ledger art images to a picture from the *Elk Morning* book. Allow time for viewing each picture and student writing.

Facilitate a class discussion regarding their comparisons and ask them to share their interpretations of the artwork they examined.

Apsáalooke Warrior Counts Coup in World War II

Share one or more of the following resources to learn more about Joe Medicine Crow and the Crow cultural tradition of counting coup.

Listen to this audio clip of Dr. Joe Medicine Crow sharing his experience of capturing horses from German officers in World War II. [A Song for the Horse Nation – Horses in Native American Cultures - Raiding](#)

The Ken Burns documentary called “The War” includes a clip of Joe taking about his war deeds. [The War | Joseph Medicine Crow | PBS](#)

[Counting Coup on the Plains \(and Overseas\) – Buffalo Bill Center of the West](#)

[Montana History Minute: Counting coup led to honor in plains tribes](#)

After students review the information, facilitate a discussion and have them write at least four sentences of what they learned about Joe Medicine Crow. Ask them to think about how his efforts might relate to the story of *Elk Morning*, which they will hear tomorrow.

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Day Three: Vocabulary and Story

Engage: Create a Venn Diagram on board with the words *courage* and *honor* above each portion. As a whole group, prompt students to determine meaning and examples of the two words. Ask engaging questions: what is courage? And honor? How are they the same? How do we define them separately? How do we demonstrate each one?

Explain that students will hear a story about a Crow tradition that displays courage and honor. Further, encourage students to find moments of courage and honor while the story is read.

Vocabulary four square: Distribute four square templates for vocabulary words: *Crow*, *Apsáalooke*, *Coups*, *Vision Quest*, *Rite of Passage*. Provide students with the definitions of these words and have them complete the template with their definition, use in a sentence, synonym, and picture. Background information regarding the vision quest ceremony can be found in this [lesson plan about Crow Chief Plenty Coup](#).

[Four Square Template Example](#)

Read *Elk Morning Counts His First Coup* aloud to students.

Return to Venn Diagram and add examples of courage/ honor to the already working example.

Reflection writing: How did the story's examples of courage and honor match our own ideas? How did they challenge our previous knowledge of courage and honor?

Once again, refer to the book and have students summarize key points in the story and utilize the synopsis to guide the discussion and review.

If possible, bring in Crow guest speakers to speak about Crow cultural traditions.

Share the following resources with the students to reinforce key ideas and Crow cultural connections with the horse.

[The Crow on Horseback – Montana Pioneer article](#)

[Montana History Minute: Crow people's strong bond with the horse – Billings Gazette video](#)

Day Four: Connecting to Place (This is specific to Red Lodge, but could be adapted)

Take students on a hike to the top of the bench where you can see the Pryor Mountains, Beartooth Mountains, and the surrounding valleys and hills.

Begin with a guided sensory grounding activity. Guide students through a silent, meditative journey of sight, smell, touch, feeling, and sounds.

Connect the setting of the story to the traditional territory of the Apsáalooke. Review the [Tribal Territories of Montana](#) map which shows the boundaries as defined by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 and the Flathead and Blackfeet Treaties of 1855. Today's reservations are also shown.

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Utilize this colorful map to make students aware of the tribal territories of the past; these aid the students in realizing the ancestral lands of a particular tribe, including seasonal migrations, hunting and fishing territories, and lands shared with other tribes.

Begin a discussion asking students to study the landscape and brainstorm challenges that young Crow men would have had to overcome on our rugged landscape to complete their coups.

Day Five: Informative/Narrative Writing

Letter Writing: Prompt students to share the main details of the story including main ideas, traditions, setting, characters, problem, connection and acknowledgement of location of where we live, and examples of courage and honor.

Ask students to reflect upon what they have learned the previous four days and facilitate a discussion. For their assignment ask them to write a letter to the Crow tribal members who authored the book explaining what they learned. As part of their letter, have them ask about modern-day traditions that earn honor and demonstrate courage for their family and tribe if counting coup is still an active Apsáalooke tradition. Student letters could also be addressed to the [Crow Tribal Education Department](#) or the Indian Education for All Unit at OPI.

Templates and letter writing resources may be found at the [Read Write Think website from NCTE](#).

Journal Writing: Have students sketch, draw, and/or write about the experience, imagining life on this land a long time ago.

Extended Learning Activities

Materials Needed

When I Was Eight by Christy Jordan Fenton

Not My Girl by Christy Jordan Fenton

Activities

The teacher will introduce and read the book, *Elk Morning Counts His First Coup*.

Discuss with your class how historically the Crow men used to count coup. Work together to come up with what it means for us to count coup today. Remind students these are acts of bravery that show courage. These acts not only make things better for the person who counted coup but for the entire tribe.

Read *When I was Eight* by Christy Jordan Fenton. Facilitate a discussion about how she counted coup in this book. How she was brave and learned even though no one believed in her. How she counted coup against the nuns and others that didn't think she could do anything.

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If time allows read *Not My Girl* by Christy Jordan Fenton. Discuss how she counted coup when she came home. How she relearned her traditional ways and overcame all her adversities.

Now, ask students to come up with a way they personally can count coup. How can they be brave and show courage? This could be at school, at home, or when playing a game or sport. Have them write a paragraph describing how they would count coup and why. Allow ample class time for their writing, and, if possible, provide an example of how you as the teacher count coup and share your paragraph with the class.

Have students share their first sentence that states what they will do to count coup. Then have them provide three detailed sentences of how they will count coup specifically. Finally, have them share a closing statement telling how they can make their families and communities proud of their efforts to count coup.

This lesson may take several days depending on how well the students are understanding the objective. Find times throughout the day when students are doing things they may not have felt they could do before. Inform them we must also count coup in academics. We push ourselves beyond what we think we can do and what others believe we can do. This helps us to be brave and step out of our comfort zone. We will then find more successes in life!

Students will complete a final draft and encourage the students to add illustrations. Have students share their final paper with the class.

Standards

Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America. (EU3)

History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell. (EU6)

English Language Arts

Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, including American Indian stories, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral. (RL.2.2)

Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question, including sources by and about American Indians. (W.2.8)

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Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; including those by and about American Indians; determine the central message, lesson, or moral; and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text. (RL.3.2)

With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose. (W.3.4)

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text; and include texts by and about American Indians. (RL.4.2)

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (W.4.4)

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text; and include texts by and about American Indians. (RL.5.2)

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (W.5.4)

Social Studies Standards

Identify different kinds of historical sources, including oral histories of American Indians. (SS.H.2.3)

Explain how perspective impacts the telling of historical events. (SS.H.3.2)

Understand tribes in Montana have their own unique histories. (SS.H.4.1)

Understand the unique historical perspectives of American Indians. (SS.H.5.4)

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